

# MICHIGAN'S Historic Resources Survey Program

**W**hat do Michigan's post offices, state parks, highway bridges and historic engineering and industrial sites, the Grand Rapids central business district, Lansing neighborhoods, and Lathrup Village outside Detroit, Mackinac Island and the villages of Calumet and Laurium, and the rural landscape of the southern part of Lima Township in Washtenaw County have in common? They are all examples of Michigan historic resources that have been subjects of historic resources surveys carried out throughout the state since the statewide survey program began in the mid-1970s.

## What is a Historic Resource?

**H**istoric resources are districts, buildings, sites, structures or objects that exemplify a period of history. Their historical value may be achieved either through association with significant historical events; through association with the lives of persons significant in our past; by embodying a particular style, type or method of construction; by possessing high artistic values; or by yielding, or being likely to yield, information important to history or prehistory. Historic resources are typically fifty years of age or older, but resources of lesser age may qualify if they have extraordinary significance.

## What is a Historic Resources Survey?

**T**he State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) oversees historic and architectural surveys. Below-ground and underwater surveys are under the purview of the Office of the State Archaeologist.

A "survey" provides the means by which we identify and document historic resources and evaluate their significance. The term describes both a process and a product. The process consists of monitoring and conducting survey projects; it leads to the creation,



growth and refinement of an inventory and ultimately the product—the survey data.

A historic resources survey requires the recordation of basic data on and the photographic documentation and mapping of individual resources in a specified area. It also requires that research be conducted to determine the historic significance of the resources surveyed. Historic resources are typically fifty years of age or older, but resources of lesser age may qualify if they have extraordinary significance.

## The Purpose of the Survey

**U**ndertaking a survey to identify historic resources acknowledges that these resources have value to ourselves and future generations. Historic resources provide character, continuity and a sense of uniqueness to the community. Survey is fundamental to historic preservation because it results in the identification of historic resources and helps determine which of those resources should be preserved. The purpose of completing a local survey is to gather the information needed to plan for the wise use of a community's resources.

A historic resource survey may also result in:

- Stimulation of interest in and increased public awareness of a community's historic resources;
- Production of information useful to local units of government or planning agencies, which in some cases may lead to attainment by a community of Certified Local Government status;

- Creation of an information base to be utilized by community action programs for either housing or commercial rehabilitation and neighborhood improvement;
- Identification of individual or historic districts to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, or commemorated with historical markers;
- Definition of areas to be designated as local historic districts under local ordinances, and preparation of historic district study committee reports in accordance with the specifications of Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act, Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended;
- Identification of historic resources in anticipation of projects that may involve building demolition and land disturbance;
- Information that is used to meet specific environmental review requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; and
- Research on properties representing a style, period, construction type or historic theme.

## The Survey Process

**T**he essential first step in any preservation effort is the location and identification of historic resources within a geographic area and their documentation according to established standards. The survey process includes planning, research, fieldwork, data organization, evaluation and reporting.

Survey planning consists of determining the area to be surveyed, the establishment of the type of survey, when the survey is to take place, and who is to carry out survey activities and the exact role of each person.

Research involves investigating the historical background of the survey area, gathering information on specific properties, persons identified with these properties and the historic uses and events connected to them. Research is carried out within the framework of historic contexts.

Historic resources surveys fall into two general types: reconnaissance-level surveys and intensive-level surveys. A reconnaissance-level survey is a first step in the survey process that identifies those areas and

properties worthy of further study. Because reconnaissance-level surveys do not typically include research on the histories of the surveyed resources, they do not provide sufficient information for making informed evaluations of historic significance. Intensive-level surveys include historical research on the surveyed properties that provides the information needed for determining which individual properties and areas are eligible for historic designations and for defining the boundaries of any historic districts.

## The Survey Products

The products of a survey are electronic database records, photographs or electronic images, maps, and a survey report. An electronic record for each surveyed property, complex and district is created using the SHPO's Ruskin survey software. For each surveyed resource locational, descriptive, historical background, and other categories of information, as well as evaluation results and other recommendations, are recorded.

## The Survey as a Basis for Future Projects and Activities

Many communities initiate their involvement in historic preservation with a survey, followed by additional activities: nominations to the national register, the establishment of local ordinances, facade studies, marketing analyses, owners' manuals, guidebooks, brochures and video presentations that utilize information from the original survey.

## Funding for the Survey

Survey activity may be funded through local government expenditure, voluntary efforts and contributions, bequests from foundations or other organizations, as well as direct involvement by preservation agencies.

The SHPO provides funding to certified local governments for intensive-level survey. For information about how to become a certified local government, and for grant selection criteria and

application materials, contact the State Historic Preservation Office.

## The State Survey Data: A Comprehensive Inventory

As the primary repository for information on Michigan's historic resources, the SHPO maintains an inventory of over 300,000 cards, 600 reports, maps, 6,000 rolls of negatives, and nearly 20,000 color slides. Since the State Survey Data is accessible to federal, state, regional and local planning officials, it can be referenced when making decisions regarding issues such as zoning, local historic districting, downtown marketing and urban revitalization. As a public resource, the State Survey Data may be consulted on a scheduled appointment basis during regular business hours.

For more information about the historic resources survey, to request the SHPO survey manual, or National Register Bulletin 24, Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning, contact the State Historic Preservation Office, Michigan Historical Center, 702 W. Kalamazoo, Lansing, Michigan 48909-8240, 517/373-1630 or e-mail us at: [preservation@michigan.gov](mailto:preservation@michigan.gov). Visit our Web site at [www.michigan.gov/hal](http://www.michigan.gov/hal).

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### PHOTOS:

Cover, Romeo Soldiers and Sailors Monument;  
and inside, Herman and Anna Hanka Farm, Baraga County,  
State Historic Preservation Office

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Michigan Historical Center**